



THINK

Exploring The Value of Think Time

By

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When was the last time you really took the time to think? If you're like most busy leaders I know, you probably said just a few minutes ago or possibly only a few hours ago. You might even be quick to respond that you're thinking right now as you read these words. If I had been asked this question only a year or two ago, I would have likely responded the same way. I might have even been annoyed by such an inquiry. After all, as leaders we get paid to think. While there is a great deal of truth to this, the deeper truth is that few of us rarely take the time to think about an issue for more than a few seconds or minutes. There are of course exceptions but more times than not today's multi-tasking leader races through the thinking process in the name of efficiency.

To be sure, success in any worthwhile endeavor demands good thinking. To move forward as leaders, we must be willing and able to analyze information accurately, anticipate the consequences of options and to draw reasonable conclusions. We also need to be able to explain our points of view by providing good reasons and at times, solid evidence. Not surprisingly, all of this takes more than a few seconds or minutes to ensure a successful outcome. By my estimation it takes even more than what is commonly referred to as *critical thinking*.

Critical thinking is the capacity to make timely, effective and well-reasoned decisions which are all absolutely essential for leadership success. Much has been written about critical thinking but a good frame of reference comes from author David T. Moore who defines *critical thinking* as, "a deliberate meta-cognitive (thinking about thinking) and cognitive (thinking) act whereby a person reflects on the quality of the reasoning process simultaneously while reasoning to a conclusion". He goes on to say that the thinker has two equally important goals: coming to a solution and improving the way she or he reasons. Hence, critical thinking means much more than logic.

Several years ago, I was involved in the delivery of an eight-module leadership series for a Hartford based client. To demonstrate the organization's commitment to the initiative, a member of the executive team did the kick-off of each workshop. For the final workshop in the two year series, the Chairman of the company did the kick-off segment. He was by all accounts a highly respected global leader with an impressive record of success over



his 40 year career. Even more importantly, he was widely known as an authentic leader who allowed his core values to guide him at every juncture.

Before the final workshop began, the two of us had nearly 30 minutes to review our presentations in an effort to create linkage between the two presentations. Knowing that I was in the presence of a true leader, I decided to seek his guidance about leadership. I was certain that even a single nugget of leadership wisdom from him would be quite meaningful. In hindsight, it was one of the most meaningful nuggets of leadership wisdom I've heard in a very long time. When asked, *what is one piece of advice you would give to a leader as he or she begins their leadership journey* he replied, "Take the time to think". I must admit that at first, I was a bit perplexed. I guess that I had expected something related to core values, emotional intelligence or even faith but certainly not the idea of "thinking".

After what seemed to be a very long pause, he went on to say that few of us rarely take the time to think. The absence of deep and deliberate thinking by his estimation had become a hurdle for both leaders and organizations.

While this leadership insight made some sense the first time I heard it, the truth is that it has become a very important part of my development both as a leader and a consultant. Taking the time to think, to really think about important issues has made the difference between seeing a limited range of options and seeing multiple options. Not surprisingly, it has also produced greater clarity and better outcomes.

Each of us is provided with numerous opportunities every day to harness our intellectual capacity by thinking in a deliberate way. Our intellect requires a voice and thinking gives it that voice. In making deliberate think time a part of your daily routine, you not only create greater clarity, purpose and meaning for yourself, but also for your team.

Five Things That You Can Do Today:

1. Evaluate the amount of time you spend thinking about key issues and consider the impact of your decisions.
2. Ask yourself, *who would benefit if I had a broader range of options to consider?*
3. Use commute time as an opportunity to think deeply about one or two key issues that you currently face.
4. Schedule at least 10 minutes of think time on your calendar every day and do your best to honor this commitment by purposefully eliminating distractions.
5. Seek input from your peers and or team about the importance of think time and solicit feedback about what works well for them.

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About David A. O'Brien:

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training and consulting services that was founded in 2000. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* was released in July 2008 and is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. Additionally, his many articles have appeared in a variety of local, regional and national publications. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at www.workchoicesolutions.com